

**Southwest Area Incident Management Team Public Information Officers
2011 Season After Action Review – August 23**

Participants and attendees: Andrew Loesch, Andrea Martinez, Annette Grijalva-Disert, Al Koss, Claudia Standish, Mark Chavez, Brienne Magee, Eric Neitzel, Pam Baltimore, Brenda Jensen, David Albo, Judy Kioski, Cam Hunter, Paige Rockett, Theresa Mendoza, Russ Braden, Jim Payne, Mike Reichling, Diane Jimenez, Brad Pitassi, Karen Mallis-Clark, Emily Leons, Cathie Schmidlin, Dave Killebrew, Jackie Banks, Buck Wickham, Gerry Perry, Michelle Fidler, Karen Takai, Mary Zabinski, Dale Thompson, Jonetta Trued.

A - What did we do this time?

- How quickly/smoothly did you activate your information function?

Did you transition with another team? What went well and what didn't?

Did you work with other teams on the same incident? What went well, what didn't?

Al Koss: Season started early (March). We received backup from NM T2 team in the PIO role and that remained true throughout the season. We had to figure out early on whose jurisdiction the fire was on so that we could direct media to the correct source for information.

Mark Chavez: At the RO level, we received information from teams in time to answer WO questions.

Claudia Standish: We used the Miller Fire to start communicating smoke messages.

Pam Baltimore: Transitions went smoothly.

Eric Neitzel: On the Wallow Fire we had a Call Center up and running by Day 3 – Used a pre-installed JIC from 8 years ago, found some bugs in the system when it was activated this time – some assumptions were made between the county and the forest, but the Call Center was a success for customers.

Brienne Magee: Saw a disconnect between teams demonstrated by the fact that 'Acres' was always a moving target. Each team reporting different acres damaged credibility with public.

Jim Payne: We got PIOs in a timely manner and the PIO training made working with the tribes and other teams on the Wallow Fire go very smoothly.

Brad Pitassi: There was a miscommunication of expectations whenever we had a transition. It seemed like a transition = delay in getting information out to the public.

Cam Hunter: Horseshoe 2 Fire was a model for talking to a wide audience. Wallow Fire suffered technical difficulties that caused considerable delays in getting information delivered. What are our fallback mechanisms for getting information delivered?

Cathie Schmidlin: Some folks had not had any experience working with Area Command and that proved to be a challenge. We need to plan contingencies for information delivery methods, pre-plan our fallbacks. Looking at our communication methods, we also need to ask ourselves, 'how do we get our message out when the tools don't work?'

Buck Wickham: When we arrived on the Wallow and Las Conchas fires, there were some disgruntled folks because they said their story wasn't being told. I think that mitigated after a few days. Successes on those fires included daily Ops & PIO briefings, Ops personnel took pictures and video for the PIOs, and the smokejumpers built a virtual tour of the fires using Google Earth. The virtual tour proved an excellent tool for public meetings. Sequestering media, seemed like a lot of work.

Karen Mallis-Clark: Wants to hear from PIO Leads about what worked in their organizational structure. Was it branching?

Gerry Perry: 2011 was first big season in a PIO role. Noticed that a large part of their success was due to the Liaison Officer in the PIO group who responded several times.

Karen Takai: Thank You! What a ride. Horseshoe 2 was the dream assignment. Wallow Fire, not perfect: It was chaos exacerbated by a lack of infrastructure. Fire grew from T2 to T1 and on Day 3 a Call Center was activated. So many emails had to be delivered that it crashed Google's system. I needed more support from every level: Forest, County, State, Federal. We need systems that can communicate 'mass emergency mailings.' Jennifer Jones has requested funding for teams giving them these tools. When we arrive, we need to assess the reality of local systems in place. Each jurisdictional agency should have a pre-plan in place. On the Las

Conchas Fire a multi-jurisdictional meeting pulled attention from the fire. The Governor was on the 'star track.' Getting Acres reported on the Wallow Fire ended up being a HUGE issue – the process for counting the acres was applied in a variety of ways. What is the role of Area Command in a complex situation? How do we integrate Type 1? I'd like to see the process for how to do this.

Michelle Fidler: The Google Earth virtual tour was a big success because it overcame the time lag in map data. The Team's PIO organizational structure was different on each assignment because tools and delivery methods were different. We had six broad functions that performed differently each time. On incidents the Forests had Social Media protocols, but then jurisdictional agencies all had different protocols as well. We need to establish early what our partners can offer.

Mary Zabinski: From the SWCC perspective, this season captured a heightened interest from the Washington Office and from other federal offices. It was earmarked by an unusual number of visits to incidents by agency and elected officials.

- What products were produced during the incident? How were they delivered?

- Fire Information brochure with photos was distributed to the public. Very positive feedback
- Thank yous that were done as photo collages in Picasa.
- Daily smoke forecasts.
- Daily smoke monitoring reports.
- NM smoke hotline (usually used for Rx burns) was retooled to give smoke reports.
- Any extra products created fostered goodwill with the public and agency personnel.
- 'Sociable' products vs. 'Social Media' products created a kind of push-pull effect.
- Seemed we created documentation for why we weren't creating more products!
- Nuggets – text messages sent internally to team members kept everybody updated.
- Using an app on IPAD to create publication-quality posters has been very popular for post-fire.
- Reverse dialing used to make contacts for public meetings.
- Used an Apache interpreter at every public meeting with Google Earth virtual tour.
- Re-entry brochures.
- When in a multiple-team environment, we need to figure out which products work for that community.
- The Kaibab NF uses Social Media tools every day. Teams that are reluctant to use SM tools will create difficulties in the community because residents are already used to SM tools.
- Seems like we are focusing more on processes instead of products.
- We had our fire updates read in Spanish over the radio. Big success.
- At one public meeting, an attendee used his smart phone to broadcast the meeting.
- Team PIOs recorded the public meeting and had it broadcast over the radio later.
- Daily Updates twice a day.
- 'Significant events' updates.
- Updated Inciweb and created autopilot functions for it so it would update other sites simultaneously.
- Autopilot functioning included Twitter, team sites and other agency websites.
- Area Command used Facebook.
- Maps.
- Firewise messages delivered in booklets, brochures and door hangers.
- Google Voice used to update the media.
- Information board traplines.

- Did you determine whether the public that was being served got the information they needed? Was information accurate, timely, understandable?

- The governor was at the fire when we were setting up.
- Short blurbs with up-to-the-minute information helped a lot.
- Liaison Officers delivered specialized products to several audiences.
- Relationships between PIOs and Ops were improved and that was helpful. PHOTOs remain hard to get.
- Liaisons were helpful because the forest had lots of interest from senators and congressionals. Teams that were feeding information into the forest were very helpful.
- Retired USFS employees requested daily updates. Found out they were feeding info to FS employees too.
- ?How do we know we are reaching them? Some people don't have electronic tools available to them.
- ?How do we communicate something that is complex in a simple manner?
- It seems like Ops personnel are reluctant to talk about smoke.
- ?Who on the team should smoke people be communicating with?
- Received a complaint about not enough post-Wallow Fire information being available in Tucson.
- Received complaints from public when their favorite PIO (Jim Whittington) went home. As long as Jim was there, they said they felt comfortable with the information they were getting.
- People who called the Call Center said media had information sooner than the Call Center personnel did. Eric confirmed there seemed to be a delay and media was getting information sooner. Can we all agree on a 1-2-3 process for updates? Who gets the information first, second, third? Internals or media?
- Within a couple of days, we had a feedback loop through the Tribal PIOs. Result was an expanded trapline.
- When Wallow Fire made its run toward Alpine, cell phones, internet and power all went down. One hardline phone worked and remaining PIOs answered it all night. Cam Hunter: What's the backup for this kind of situation? Phoenix media couldn't get any information. A Liaison Officer reportedly drove out of incident area to get to a pay phone to call someone at the state. That was only information available. Shouldn't we include the utility companies in the contingency planning? Should we develop a satellite site for PIOs to get information out that would not be in the fire area?
- !Team should address contingency planning for Team functioning. We should be having this conversation with our team members.
- In the new team configurations that are being proposed, there is no Liaison Officer position. Excluding Liaison Officer positions in future teams is a bad idea. We have established through multiple experiences they are extremely effective. Social Research evidence supports that Liaison Officers are extremely effective.
- !Fire Updates have too much jargon. We need to rewrite them to use plain English. And we need to include the 'why' element in updates – 'why is this important to the public.'
- Incident Management Team PIOs need to communicate up the ladder frequently. These people have our backs.
- During the IMT set-up period, we need to put a PIO in a motel with hardline and cell phones and internet capabilities to eliminate the delay in getting information out. When ICP is set up, that PIO can be brought in.
- Use local radio more.
- Use Social Media monitoring metrics to find out how fire information is being accessed.
- Monitor the media better.

- Did you have the equipment or logistical support you needed? What was lacking?

- At times we did not have enough computers.
- Our equipment was compromised by the environment. We went to the District Office to work so that our computers and printers could operate.
- PIOs are needed in a satellite office away from the environmental conditions imposed by ICP.
- There needs to be a Liaison assigned to connect the IMT PIOs and the Forest Public Affairs Office.
- Working without phone lines and internet is not acceptable for the Team PIO function.
- There needs to be a deputy PIO in the Forest PAO office to make it smoother for the Forest.
- Is there any way the IMTs can get kits to resolve some communication problems? Satellite phones?
- Counties have resources: we need to know what they have and whether we can use them.
- Arizona State has mobile communications van. Cam Hunter: 5-6 PIOs can work inside it at a time.
- A van from NM State was set up at the Las Conchas Fire evacuation center. It worked very well.
- Can IMT PIOs tie in with the county's or the state's EOC for better support?
- Can IMT PIOs use the 'cloud computing' environment to better facilitate message delivery to all audiences?
- Cell phone Cows are critical resources.

- Did you use Social Media? What did you use? Did you have personnel who knew how to use it? Did the hosting unit request or require you use SM tools? Did the public demand it? How did SM tools affect the information that was released?

- Twitter was important.
- Inciweb – Sometimes it didn't work, sometimes it did. When it didn't work, then auto updates to other websites was also disabled.
- Posted to NM Fire Information website.
- Posted to AZ EIN website.
- Used E-Trapline.
- Area Command had a Facebook presence on the Wallow Fire.
- Updates automatically delivered to AZ Wildland Fire site and AZ EIN.
- Used Flickr.
- Used Tribal Facebook accounts.
- ?Which one gets updated first? Is there a 1-2-3 process for this? Are there any SOPs for what sequence updates are made to the different sites?
- Worked with Coronado NF's existing SM protocols during the Horseshoe 2 Fire. But, the Wallow Fire was bigger than one jurisdiction so we needed to develop Incident-Specific Social Media presence vs. using a Forest or other home unit site that already exists. On the Las Conchas Fire, multiple partners were consolidated by using Twitter.
- The Google Earth tools were very effective.
- Developed a Social Media group within the PIO staff. They were skilled and effective.
- ?How do we order Social Media skilled PIOs? Very few PIOs that are called out actually have SM skills.

B - What do we want to do next time?

- What products will be produced? How will they be delivered? Use SM tools?

- We need credentials for PIOs with Social Media skills. We need to identify them in ROSS and be able to put in a request for Social Media PIOs.

- We need a cache for IMTs to operate with the first few days of an incident while setting up. Cache kits need to have communication devices including satellite phones.
- Establish a Liaison Officer in the PIO staff.
- Use auto feeds for existing websites that carry wildland fire/emergency information.
- Set up Social Media tools that we are allowed to use. Check with our partners to see what they are using.
- Get the 'process for counting acres' nailed down so that reporting acres is the same for everyone.
- Use a pre-identified communication strategy developed by the Forest or hosting unit.
- When confronted with 'you're not getting information out,' first determine what KIND of information isn't being relayed and who it's not getting to.
- Work with the multitude of local jurisdictional agencies that are already in place.
- Before season begins, pre-load available PIO lists into email accounts.
- Before season begins, pre-load available Media lists into email accounts. Does the Forest/home unit have the responsibility for providing teams with a media list?
- Develop or find an assessment tool for the local area where the incident is located. Infrastructure available?
- Develop an understanding of how the State's JIS-JIC works. Is it the FEMA model? Training is available.
- Develop one Twitter account that serves the incident.
- Produce 'the story.' Gila NF is a model for this: "we don't fight fire the way we used to."
- Develop a communication plan for smoke.
- Assign one IMT PIO as a Liaison for smoke and other agency personnel who have inputs.
- Need to CONTINUE training on Social Media tools. You lose it if you don't use it.
- Bring in as many PIOs as you need – we chronically run too small and it has negative impacts.
- Develop a way for locals to sign up their emails to get direct updates.
- Heavy use of Twitter and Flickr.
- Do the local angle: do stories about area archaeological sites and what firefighters are doing to protect them.

- How do you want to operate?

What is appropriate to expect during transitions between teams?

How do you address the changing of roles and responsibilities during a growing incident: Type 3→Type 2→Type 1→Area Command?

- What equipment, technology and environment do you need?

What do PAOs need to know in advance?

- Need a transition plan from the team already in place.
- Need to find a way to share PIO resources between teams.
- Be ready to make reassignments of PIOs: Liaison in home unit PA Office, Liaison at other team's ICP.
- Practice flexibility. Remain committed to communication. Retain humility
- Develop SOPs.
- IMT PIO Leads need to meet right up front.
- Public Information must be included in the Delegation of Authority.
- ?Why did the Teams 'disappear' when Area Command came in?
- Should each Team develop a statement of intent? Would that help focus?
- Capitalize on whatever the former team was doing that was working. Adjust what wasn't working.
- Adapt to local circumstances.
- Broadcast public meetings.
- Get cell phones that PIOs can check out for duration of the incident.

- Get Inciweb perimeter map accessible to site on all incidents – sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't.
- Lead PIOs need to obtain a copy of the home unit's Incident Communication Strategy.
- Upon arrival, assess logistical support that is/is not available to the team in that area.
- Use Google Earth – modis.
- Put videos on YouTube.
- Get a pre-season package available online for PIOs to help them become more productive with laptops.
- Can we develop a Regional standardized Communication Plan for home units to work off of?
- Be able to order Social Media competent PIOs through ROSS.
- Find a backup for Google – it CAN FAIL too!
- Find a place to set up a PIO immediately – motel room? Phone and internet available.
- Remember: Not all units have designated PAOs. Sometimes it's a collateral duty. Find 'External Affairs.'

- What human resources do you want?

What skills should Type 1, Type 2, Type 3 and Trainees have?

How do we determine appropriate staffing levels for an incident?

- Order key people, for Social Media, for Media visits. Name requests are frowned on and there is a breakdown in the qualification system for PIOs: We have Type 1 "qualified" PIOs who can't write a fire update and PIOFs who are Type 1 PIOs in all but their ROSS identified level. Can we talk to dispatch about name requests? Seems like every assignment is a Training Assignment these days. We have a LOT of unqualified PIOs that are in ROSS these days because of the time period when people could sign up to be a PIO without any training. Now we have to deal with them. Do we have the guts to illuminate their deficiencies and de-mob them?
- Order heavy to begin with. Excess personnel can always be sent de-mobed. How do we deal with PIOs who can't get dressed properly for an on-camera media interview? Unprofessional appearance affects credibility.
- Use WUI as an assessment tool to identify appropriate staffing levels on incidents, not just media interest.

- What security and safety issues will you want to have implemented?

How soon should PIOs be evacuated? Should they go sooner than the team? Where?

Do advance planning for safety of PIOs. Identify location to meet at if ICP gets evacuated. Use buddy system to help account for all PIOs.

Have all PIOs sign in and sign out daily.

This season PIOs came to incidents without PPE and the incident could not provide it either. As a result, information boards did not get updated some days because PIOs had to drive through an active fire area in order to get to where the information boards were located.

Incidents this season did not have enough radios in camp for PIOs to check out.

Border protocols on the Coronado NF require PIOs travel in pairs and call in every two hours. Should this be an SOP for all incidents?

Get some identification for all personnel working with the PIO staff such as Call Center personnel who have to drive through an active fire area to get to their assignment location.

Get your team to talk about whether smoke makes you move your ICP.

Make sure Ops personnel share information with PIOs about possible or planned burnouts.

Do pre-season work with media.

C - What do we need to do now to be ready?

- What processes can be streamlined before the next event?
- What SOPs are agreed upon and can be implemented among all teams?
 - Are there transition protocols that all teams can perform? What are they?
 - Do we have the right expectations of Type 1, Type 2, Type 3 and Trainees?
- What equipment can we acquire in advance to assist in operational efficiency and effectiveness?
- Are there new technology or internet tools available to everyone?
- What gaps in knowledge and skills exist and how can those gaps be filled? Training?

NOTE: Since we had 15 minutes to visit this section, we asked for the best of the best: Your Best Shot.

- Templates
- State media lists
- SOPs for Forest, Team, AC: Expectations for all three
- Social Media delivery order: 1-2-3 of who gets what and in what sequence
- Continuous training in Social Media
- Develop Social Media into E-Trapline: all internet tools: cloud, Skype, YouTube and vet with agency policies
- Identify trigger point to get other agencies involved
- Develop an organization chart for the PIO staff.
- Develop a flow chart for the delivery of messages: who do we feed information to? What are their roles?